

63.

A
SHORT SKETCH
OF THE
L I F E
OF
Mr. FOSTER POWELL,
The Great Pedestrian,

Who departed this Life April 15, 1793,

In the 59th Year of his Age.

*Tho' many a race this man has won,
Yet at last he is by death outdone.*

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OF
MR FOSTER POWELL



By the Rev. J. H. WISTLEY, D.D.,

Canon of the Cathedral of Exeter.

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To the PUBLIC.

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In all ages there have been men who have distinguished themselves in some particular manner from the bulk of mankind, I may say few have caused more notice than the deceased, who was without partiality the greatest Pedestrian ever known in England, and singularized himself as such for upwards of thirty years.

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Life of Mr. Foster Powell.

HE was born at *Horseforth*, near *Leeds*, in *Yorkshire*, in the year 1734; the former part of his life he passed in obscurity, till he came to *London* in the year 1762, and articled himself to an attorney in the *Temple*, with whom he served his clerkship; at the expiration of the term, he was with his uncle Mr. POWELL, of the *New Inn*, and at his death he engaged with a Mr. STOKES, of the same place, with whom he continued till his decease;

cease; since which he has been with Mr. BINGLY, of the *New Inn*.

Little of his character is known as a Pedestrian till he engaged with Mr. STOKES. Before that time he undertook in the year 1764, to go fifty miles on the *Bath* road in seven hours; which he accomplished in the time, having gone the first ten miles in one hour, although encumbered with a great coat and leather breeches. But this journey I do not find he undertook for any wager.

He went into several parts of Switzerland, and into France, where he walked two hundred miles beyond Paris, and gained much praise there. He went several journies before his fame was spread as a Pedestrian, and his modesty was such that he did not wish to make it publicly known.

In the year 1773, he engaged to go on foot from *London* to *York* and back

back again in six days ; which he accomplished in five days and eighteen hours—the distance amounting to 402 miles.

He did not undertake any journey after this till the year 1786, when he agreed to walk one hundred miles on the *Bath* road, that is, fifty miles out and fifty in, and completed it in twenty-three hours and a quarter, though he was allowed twenty-four hours to do it in. This great performance caused much noise in *London*, and made his fame spread abroad as a Pedestrian.

The next year 1787, he undertook to go on foot from *Canterbury* to *London Bridge* and back again in twenty-four hours : the distance is one hundred and twelve miles, which he accomplished to the astonishment of some thousands of spectators, who were waiting with anxious desires for his safe arrival.

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The following year, 1788, he engaged to go his favorite journey from *London* to *York* and back again in six days, which he executed in five days and twenty hours. After this he did not undertake any journey, till the year 1790, when he set off to walk from *London* to *York* and back again; he was allowed six days to do it, and accomplished it in five days and eighteen hours.

Having convinced the world so many times, that he could compleat the journey to *York* and back again in less than six days, he was determined once more, for the last time in his life, to convince them that he could do it in a shorter time than ever he had, although at the advanced age of fifty eight years: and in the year 1792 he set off from *Shoreditch Church* to *York Minster* and back again, in five days, fifteen hours and one quarter, to the very great astonishment of many thousands of spectators: this journey
it

it is supposed by the faculty, was the cause of his death, having never recovered the great fatigue that he experienced in performing it in so short a time.

This same year, he walked for a bet of twenty guineas, six miles in fifty-five minutes and a half, on the *Clapham Road*: and the same year he went down to *Brighton*, and engaged to walk one mile and run another, in fifteen minutes, which he performed in fourteen minutes and forty-three seconds, which was seventeen seconds less than the time allowed him; he walked the mile in nine minutes and twenty seconds, and run the mile in five minutes and twenty-three seconds.

He never was a great gainer by any of his undertakings; the largest sum he ever got, was by the last journey to *Canterbury*, which, although he lost, owing to his mistaking the road from *Blackheath* to *London*; yet his friends
feeling

feeling for the great disappointment he experienced, collected for him the sum of forty pounds: he never shewed that he thirsted for money, nor was he avaricious; had this been the case, there is not a doubt but he might have gained some thousands; he was content with a little, and felt a secret pleasure in being able at all times to fulfil his engagements.

His person was tall and thin, about five feet nine inches high, very strong downwards, well calculated for walking, and of rather sallow complexion.

He was very particular in his diet, seldom or ever ate any meat on his journies, but mostly light food: he frequently met with great disappointments on his travels at those houses on the road where he usually stopped for refreshment; he allowed himself only five hours sleep, and those from eleven o'clock at night.

Thus

Thus I have endeavoured to give you a brief sketch of the life of this surprising man, whose equal it is most likely will never be found. He departed this life *Monday* morning, about four o'clock, *April* 15th, in the fifty-ninth year of his age, much regretted by those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. He was of a mild disposition, possessed of many valuable qualifications, and discharged himself with fidelity and sobriety, meriting the esteem of his master. By his own particular request, his body was interred in the burying ground of *St. Faith, St. Paul's, April* 22, 1793.

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